

Magruder's American Government
2005 Edition

BCHS Class Notes

Ch I, Section 2, Part A

Forms of Government

1. What are some of the basic ways that governments are classified?

Magruder's classifies them by three basic points. That works for me. Here we go:

Who can participate in the governmental process?

How is governmental power distributed?

How is power distributed between the branches (legislative, executive, and judicial) of government?

2. In terms of who can participate in government, what are three types of government?

Democracy, Oligarchy, and Autocracy

3. In a *democracy*, who rules?

The People (the many)

4. In an *oligarchy*, who rules?

An elite group (the few)

5. In an *autocracy*, who rules?

A single person (the one)

6. In a democracy, sovereignty rests with whom?

The people

7. In a democracy, the functions of government are carried out with the consent of whom?

The people

8. What is a *direct democracy*?

A situation in which the people decide the exact policies and laws under which they will live.

9. What is *indirect democracy*?

A situation in which the people elect representatives who establish the laws and policies under which the people will live.

10. Have there been any recent examples of direct democracy in Baldwin County, Alabama?

Yep, in November 2012 the voters re-approved a sales tax for schools

11. Have there been any recent examples of indirect democracy in the United States?

Yep. On November 6, 2012, American voters in their respective states elected members of the **Electoral College**. In December 2012, members of the **Electoral College** cast **electoral votes** for both **President** and **Vice President**.

In that election, **President Barack Obama** and **Vice President Joe Biden** each received **332 electoral votes**, a number in excess of the **270** needed to win. As such both **President Obama** and **Vice President Biden** were re-elected to four more years.

Their second terms began on **January 20, 2013** at noon, eastern standard time.

12. In what way is the United States of America also a *republic*?

For the most part, direct democracy is rare in the U.S., and most law and policy is made by elected and appointed **representatives**, and these representatives govern according to the rules established by the constitution. In short, the United States is **both** a democracy and a republic.

A republic and a democracy are concepts that are distinct, but they are not in contradiction to one another. Simply put, a republic and a democracy are **NOT** mutually exclusive.

By the way, every now and then you might run into someone who will tell you that the U.S. is not a democracy, but a republic. **Most of these folks are kooks.** It is true that the U.S. is not much of a direct democracy, but that's beside the point. The U.S. is very much both an indirect democracy...and a republic.

13. What two terms are interchangeable when describing the nature of the American state?

Representative Democracy and Democratic Republic

14. What is a *dictatorship*?

Basically it's a state in which **one person (autocracy)** or a **self-appointed self-perpetuating small group (oligarchy)** holds practical sovereign power in a state.

15. What can be confusing about this definition of *dictatorship*?

In common conversational language, a dictator is one person, and thus---in the eyes of many people--a dictatorship is always an autocracy.

But in more scholarly circles, a dictatorship can be either an autocracy or an oligarchy.

15. What are some examples of dictatorships in the past 100 years?

The Soviet Union (autocracy under Josef Stalin, an oligarchy in other periods)

Nazi Germany (basically an autocracy under Adolf Hitler)

The People's Republic of China (largely an oligarchy)

North Korea (autocracy)

